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**SUBJECT: 2013 preliminary waterfowl survey results**

*Ducks*

According to the Van Horn, waterfowl breeding areas in parkland and prairie Canada this spring had mostly good to excellent conditions, so duck breeding is expected to be good overall. Some areas of Saskatchewan have seen the best conditions in decades. Spring habitat conditions for the US prairies were also encouraging this year. In North Dakota, wetland numbers were just above average and breeding duck numbers were well above the long-term average. Preliminary information from the USFWS waterfowl surveys across Canada indicate good to excellent breeding habitat.

Here in Wisconsin, increased winter and spring precipitation across the state provided adequate water on the landscape and helped alleviate the drought conditions of last year. Counts during the survey indicated improved conditions from 2012 in all regions except for portions of the north, with the most above or near the average for the last 10 years. Continued rainfalls have improved the observed conditions, and overall Wisconsin's marshes and other waters should provide good brood habitat in 2013.

The four most abundant ducks in Wisconsin's fall hunting harvest are mallards, wood ducks, green-winged teal, and blue-winged teal. Van Horn notes that many of the ducks harvested in Wisconsin come from birds that breed in Wisconsin, in contrast to other states in the flyway which rely more heavily on birds raised in the prairies or boreal forests of Canada.

"These are population estimates – not exact counts – so changes of plus or minus 20 percent in the estimates each year may not reflect any real change in the actual population. They are best viewed as trends," Van Horn said.

The 2013 total Wisconsin breeding duck population estimate of 527,340 is similar to 2012 and 19 percent above the long-term (40 year) average. This is good news and reflects stable duck populations in a year where late spring weather made timing of the spring survey very challenging.

The 2013 total mallard population estimate of 181,200 is down 8 percent from the 2012 estimate of 196,950 and remains at the long-term average (40 year). Mallards contribute nearly 40 percent of the overall state duck harvest in Wisconsin. After an increase in the 1990s, the breeding population of mallards in Wisconsin has leveled off near 200,000 in recent years, subject to some variation of annual wetland conditions. Overall, mallard production in Wisconsin is expected to be similar to the last 10-year period.

The second most abundant duck in the fall harvest is the wood duck and breeding wood duck populations continue to provide an encouraging outlook for Wisconsin. In 2013, the population estimate for wood ducks of 91,516 is down 14 percent from 2012, but still 16 percent above the long-term average. Most of the decrease from last year was observed in the north. Survey results may have been impacted by the fact that ice and snow had only left this survey region about one week prior to the survey.

“Wood ducks continue to be an important component of Wisconsin’s breeding duck population and hunters’ fall bag. We suspect the 2013 estimates to be more a factor of survey challenges than actual population decline,” said Van Horn.

The 2013 blue-winged teal breeding population estimate of 79,223 is down 31 percent compared to 2012. Because large groups are assumed to be in migration and not included in breeding estimate, some of observed decrease can be explained by groups of teal in the south that were still waiting to head north. Continentally, blue-winged teal remain at very high breeding populations but have remained below historic numbers in Wisconsin.

“Continued attention must be paid to habitat conservation of these grassland nesters,” Van Horn said.

### ***Canada geese***

There are two different populations of Canada geese that represent most of the geese in Wisconsin during the regular fall hunting season. The average over the last several years has shown the hunting harvest split between these two populations during the regular hunting seasons, according to Van Horn. One population, called resident giant Canada geese, nests in Wisconsin. The 2013 Wisconsin breeding Canada goose population estimate of 138,925 showed a minor decline (from 145,386 birds in 2012) and is 51 percent above the long term (27 year) average.

“We expect a healthy Canada goose population this fall, particularly for the early September Canada goose season, which now makes up a third of our total statewide harvest” said Van Horn.

The second Canada goose population is the Mississippi Valley Population, which is made up of slightly smaller birds that nest along the coast of Hudson Bay in northern Ontario and migrate through Wisconsin. Though Wisconsin shares this population with other states, these birds comprise over half of the state harvest, unlike neighboring states such as Minnesota where resident birds make up the vast majority of the harvest, Van Horn said.

Surveys are conducted in northern Ontario each year to assess the status of the Mississippi Valley Population, and provide a basis for managing harvest regulations. Surveys have been completed but data will not be available for 1 to 2 more weeks. Because of the variability of breeding success on these northern nesters and the importance of these birds to our overall harvest, future population trends will continue to be closely monitored.